



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

6751 Columbia Gateway Drive, Suite 400, Columbia, Maryland 21046
410-313-6000

JOHN S. BUTLER, FIRE CHIEF • ALLAN H. KITTLEMAN, COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Office of the Fire Marshal Pre-Inspection of Assembly Occupancies

A fire safety inspection will be conducted by the Office of the Fire Marshal at your place of assembly. This fire safety inspection will assist you with providing a safe atmosphere for you, your patrons and your employees as well as the protection of your business. Our goal is to maintain a fire safe environment which is one step in leading to a fire safe Howard County.

In order to streamline the process, there are several items that can be corrected prior to the inspection. We have prepared this list for your review prior to the inspection and for future self-inspections.

Assembly: An occupancy (1) used for a gathering of 50 or more persons for deliberation, worship, eating, entertainment, drinking, amusement, awaiting transportation, or similar uses; or (2) used as a special amusement building, regardless of occupant load.

Exits - All exits shall be kept clear at all times. Doors shall operate to the fully open position, securely latch when closed and be maintained in proper working order. Panic hardware and door closures shall be maintained in working order. Doors equipped with panic hardware shall not have any additional locks or latches. Exits shall not be locked from the egress side. All magnetic or special locking arrangements need to be approved by the AHJ.

Exit Signs - All exit signs shall be illuminated and visible at all times.

Fire Extinguishers - All fire extinguishers shall be serviced annually by a licensed extinguisher company. Fire extinguishers shall be unobstructed, full, tagged, dated, and the key shall be in place and protected with a plastic seal. The extinguishers shall be mounted, with the top of the extinguisher between 3 and 5 feet in height and the bottom not closer than 4 inches to the floor.

Fire Alarm Systems - Fire alarm pull stations and alarm signaling devices shall be accessible, unobstructed, and visible. Fire alarm systems are required to be fully operational at all times and have a full system inspection annually by a licensed fire alarm technician. The service report shall be reviewed and all deficiencies shall be corrected. The service report shall be kept on the premises. A Fire Watch is required for any system Out of Service for more than 4 hours.

Sprinkler Systems - Sprinkler heads shall not be obstructed or have articles hanging from them. Sprinkler control valve rooms shall be marked. A 3 feet clearance shall be kept around the valves. Sprinkler systems are required to be fully operational at all times and have a full system inspection annually by a licensed sprinkler technician. The service report shall be reviewed and all deficiencies shall be corrected. The service report shall be kept on the premises.

Fire Department Connections (FDC) – Sprinkler/standpipe fire department connections consist of all hose connections and control valves. All FDCs shall have signage as designated by the Office of the Fire Marshal. The FDC and its respective signage shall be visible to responding fire department units. The access to and around the FDC shall be kept clear.

Emergency Lighting - Emergency lighting shall be maintained to automatically provide illumination in case of failure of normal lighting.



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Commercial Hood Systems – The hood’s automatic fire-extinguishing system shall comply with UL300 or equivalent. The filters must be clean. When there are visible deposits of grease in the hood, the entire system shall be cleaned. Commercial hood systems shall be inspected every 6 months by a licensed technician. The service report shall be reviewed and all deficiencies shall be corrected. The service report shall be kept on the premises.

Storage - All storage shall be 18 inches below the ceiling as well as any sprinkler heads. It is suggested that painted lines or tape be placed on the walls to indicate “no storage above this point”. NO storage shall be placed, or kept in any portion of an exit or an exit stairway. A 36 inch clearance of combustibles shall be maintained around all heat producing devices.

Equipment rooms - Combustible material shall not be stored in boiler rooms, mechanical rooms, or electrical rooms.

Electrical panels - All storage shall be kept 36 inches away from all electrical panels. All doors or panels will be latched closed. Blanks shall be placed in open panels. Breakers shall not be taped or held in the on position by any device or made inoperable in any manner. Circuit locks may be used to lock a breaker in the off position. Other devices may be used to prevent a breaker from being turned off but must not interfere with the breaker’s normal operation. Electric rooms shall be marked.

Extension cords - Extension cords shall not be utilized as permanent wiring. Extension cords shall only be used on a temporary basis. All cords and equipment shall be listed by a testing laboratory recognized by the State of Maryland.

Power strips - A breaker protected power strip shall be utilized when multiple outlets are needed. Multiple power strips shall not be “piggy backed” together to form a longer service. Major appliances such as refrigerators and microwaves shall be plugged directly in an outlet.

Housekeeping - Accumulation of trash, refuse or debris is not permitted either inside or outside. Exterior combustible or flammable material, including dumpsters, shall not be located within 15 feet of the building, structure, or property line.

Fire/Smoke Assemblies - All walls, ceilings, and floor assemblies shall be maintained. Wall openings and pipe chases shall be sealed to the classification of the wall. Ceiling tiles are not permitted to be painted. All ceiling tiles shall be in place.

Curtains, draperies and decorations – Curtains, draperies and other similar furnishings and decorations shall meet the flame resistance standards outlined by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Unsecured Seating (seats not secured to the floor)– In an assembly with an occupancy load of less than 200, rows of seating shall have a path of travel not exceeding 30’ in length from any seat to an aisle. A minimum of 12 inches shall be maintained between the front of a seat and the back of the seat in the next row. Seating diagrams shall be submitted for approval to the Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) for occupancies with unsecured seating over 200.



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Tents - All tents over 120 ft² require a permit. Tents shall be located a minimum 10 feet from any structure, shall not block any exit from a structure, or be a part of a structure's exit way. Tents shall meet NFPA 701 flame resistance standards to be occupied by the public or used for any cooking. Tents with an occupancy load of 50 or more are classified as an assembly and therefore shall have a minimum of 2 marked exits. When side panels are installed, doors must be a contrasting color. All heating/AC must be approved by OFM.

Crowd Managers – All assemblies are required to have at least 1 crowd manager on duty. When the occupant load exceeds 250 persons, 1 crowd manager per 250 persons or fraction thereof is required. The Office of the Fire Marshal provides free crowd manager training.

Occupancy Load – Keep an accurate count of the number of occupants at all times. All areas of assembly shall have a capacity sign issued by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Street Address Numbers - Street address numbers should be viewable from the street. The numbers shall be at least 6 inches high on a contrasting background.

Candles and Open Flame Devices – The use of these devices shall be in accordance with the policies of the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Per County Code, HCDFRS charges for fire inspections, re-inspections and any associated services. You will receive an invoice from the Department of Finance after the inspection is within compliance and all paperwork has been completed.

This program is important and necessary to safeguard the lives and property of the people we protect. Therefore, we ask for your fullest cooperation in correcting any violations so that together we can improve fire safety.